

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY BONN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 0906

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IS US XF

SUBJ: THE EMERGING DEBATE: U.S. STAGED APPROACH VS. GENEVA

1. SUMMARY. ISRAELIS REGARD SECRETARY'S MIDEAST MISSION AS CRITICAL TEST FOR US DIPLOMACY, TO CLARIFY WHETHER SECOND STAGE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI AGREEMENT CAN BE ACHIEVED, AND TO ASSESS VALIDITY OF US STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH FOR NEXT PHASE OF NEGOTIATIONS. ISRAELIS WILL ALSO BE LOOKING TO SECRETARY TO REASSURE THEM THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO SERIOUS EROSION OF BASIC US WILLINGNESS TO CONTINUE NECESSARY POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO ISRAEL.

2. ISRAELIS BELIEVE THAT SECRETARY'S PRESENCE IN AREA WILL

BE CATALYST TO NEGOTIATING PROCESS, BUT THERE IS GENERAL SKEPTICISM THAT GAP BETWEEN ISRAELI AND EGYPTIAN POSITIONS CAN BE CLOSED. MAIN QUESTION FROM ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE IS WHETHER SADAT IS PREPARED TO MAKE THE NECESSARY
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SUBSTATIVE POLITICAL CONCESSIONS, OPENLY AND IN WRITING,

IN EXCHANGE FOR ISRAELI TERRITORIAL WITHDRAWALS IN SINAI. WHILE PRIME MINISTER RABIN REMAINS CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC IN PUBLIC, MOST POLITICANS AND COMMENTATORS DOUBT THAT SADAT WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE NECESSARY POLITICAL CONCESSIONS. IT IS BROADLY BELIEVED THAT SECRETARY WILL HAVE TO CONVINCE ENTIRE ISRAELI CABINET, INCLUDING ITS HARDLINE ELEMENTS, ON TERMS OF AGREEMENT, AND THAT RABIN WILL NOT JEOPARDIZE HIS COALITION BY FORCING SHOWDOWN WITH PERES (AND BY EXTENSION WITH DAYAN). IN EFFECT, GOI IS EXPECTED TO PRESENT HARD UNITED FRONT.

3. OUTCOME OF SECRETARY'S MEDIATION EFFORT IS ALSO LINKED TO INTENSIVE REASSESSMENT IN ISRAELI POLITICAL CIRCLES OF RELATIVE MERITS OF US STAGED APPROACH AND EARLY CONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE. WIDE SPECTRUM OF ISRAELI POLITICIANS NOW BELIEVE THAT US STAGED APPROACH HAS REACHED OR IS NEARING END OF ITS UTILITY. SOME MODERATES SPECULATE THAT GENEVA CONFERENCE COULD LEAD WAY TO OVERALL SETTLEMENT, WITH ISRAEL OFFERING MAXIMUM TERRITORIAL WITHDRAWALS ON ALL FRONTS IN EXCHANGE FOR MAJOR ARAB POLITICAL CONCESSIONS. HARDLINERS, ON OTHER HAND, SEE CONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE PRIMARILY AS TACTICAL DEVICE TO STALL FOR TIME, TO CALL ARAB/SOVIET BLUFF, MAKE CLEAR TO WESTERN OPINION THAT ARABS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR FAILURE TO REACH SETTLEMENT, AND TO PREPARE ISRAELI PUBLIC FOR NEXT STAGE OF CONFLICT. END SUMMARY.

4. THE MAIN QUESTIONS: ISRAEL LOOKS FORWARD TO SECRETARY'S VISIT TO MEDEAST NEXT WEEK AS CRITICAL TEST FOR US DIPLOMACY, TO DETERMINE WHETHER SECOND STAGE EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI AGREEMENT THROUGH US MEDIATION CAN BE ACHIEVED AND, MORE BROADLY, WHETHER USG STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH FOR ATTAINING NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENTS OF ARAB- ISRAELI DISPUT REMAINS VIABLE. THERE IS DEEP SENSE OF UNCERTAINTY AS REGARDS THESE INTERRELATED ISSUES. AT SAME TIME, PUBLIC ANXIETY ABOUT US "PRESSURE" TO COMPEL GOI TO MAKE CONCESSIONS JEOPARDIZING ITS VITAL SECURITY INTERESTS APPEARS TO HAVE SUBSIDED FROM ITS PREVIOUS HIGH PITCH--PARTLY AS RESULT OF ALLON'S POSITIVE ASSESSMENT OF HIS LAST WASHINGTON TRIP.

5. SOVIET-ARAB RELATIONS. SECRETARY'S MIDEAST MISSION TAKES
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PLACE AGAINST BACKDROP OF GROMYKO'S TRIPS TO DAMASCUS AND CAIRO, WHICH ISRAELIS TENTATIVELY REGARD AS UNSUCCESSFUL SOVIET EFFORT TO CIRCUMSCRIBE US STAGED OPTION BY PRESSING FOR COORDINATED SOVIET/ARAB DEMAND FOR CONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE. ISRAELIS DRAW RATHER SHARP DISTINCTION BETWEEN CURRENT STATE OF SOVIET RELATIONS WITH SYRIA AND WITH EGYPT. COMPARISON OF SOVIET/SYRIAN AND SOVIET/EGYPTIAN COMMUNIQUE HAS REINFORCED ISRAELI VIEW THAT EGYPT FOR TIME

BEING STILL IS SEEKING TO ATTAIN ITS IMMEDIATE POLITICAL OBJECTIVES THROUGH US STAGED APPROACH.

6. EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. FOR ISRAELIS, MAIN QUESTION NOW IS WHETHER SADAT IS PREPARED TO MAKE NECESSARY SUBSTANTIVE POLITICAL CONCESSIONS IN EXCHANGE FOR ISRAELI AGREEMENT FOR PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL IN SINAI. WHILE THERE IS NO FIRM CONSENSUS AS TO NATURE OF POLITICAL CONCESSIONS REQUIRED, ISRAELIS DESCRIBE THEM IN GENERAL AS INVOLVING SIGNIFICANT TIME COMPONENT AND CERTAIN ELEMENTS OF AN ENDING OF STATE OF BELLIGERENCY. THERE IS BROAD CONSENSUS AMONG COMMENTATORS THAT CREDIBILITY OF EGYPTIAN CONCESSIONS WOULD BE SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCED IF THEY WERE MADE PUBLICLY AND IN WRITING, RATHER THAN AS SECRET COMMITMENTS TRANSMITTED THROUGH USG TO GOI.

7. ISRAELI VIEWS. IN PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF PROSPECTS FOR ATTAINMENT OF SECOND STAGE AGREEMENT, SENIOR GOI LEADERS, PARTICULARLY RABIN AND ALLON, ARE SOMEWHAT MORE SANGUINE THAN PARLIAMENTARIANS AND POLITICAL COMMENTATORS. PRIME MINISTER RABIN, SPEAKING AT WORLD JEWISH CONGRESS FEB 5, GAVE FIRM RE-ENDORSEMENT TO US STAGED APPROACH, CHARACTERIZING IT AS "BEST AND MOST REALISTIC WAY TO PROCEED". AFTER NOTING SADAT'S RECENT STATEMENTS IN PARIS AND CAIRO THAT EGYPT AND SYRIA WOULD NOT INITIATE WAR ON ISRAEL, RABIN SAID THAT IF SADAT IS PREPARED TO MAKE WRITTEN UNDERTAKING TO ISRAEL ALONG THESE LINES THIS WOULD CONSTITUTE "GREAT CHANGE" FOR ACHIEVING NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT.

8. IN CONTRAST, ISRAELI PARLIAMENTARIANS AND COMMENTATORS IN RECENT DAYS HAVE EXPRESSED DEEP SKEPTICISM ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR SECOND STAGE AGREEMENT. THEIR VIEW IS THAT SADAT IS UNPREPARED TO MAKE NECESSARY POLITICAL CONCESSIONS, THAT TIME COMPONENT WILL BE TOO SHORT, AND THAT GOI WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL

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COMPELLED TO REJECT EGYPTIAN TERMS. STRONG CONSENSUS IN THESE CIRCLES IS THAT GOI, TAKING ACCOUNT OF BOTH INTRINSIC STRATEGIC INTERESTS AND DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS, WILL HAVE DIFFICULTY ACCEPTING NEW AGREEMENT UNLESS SECRETARY CAN "DELIVER" VERY CONCRETE AND PUBLICLY VISIBLE EGYPTIAN POLITICAL CONCESSIONS.

9. COMMENTATORS ALSO BELIEVE THAT CABINET WILL PRESENT UNITED FRONT, AND THAT RABIN WILL NOT GET INTO CONFRONTATION WITH PERES OVER TERMS OF AGREEMENT. SECRETARY, IN EFFECT, WILL HAVE TO CARRY ENTIRE CABINET INCLUDING ITS MOST "HARDLINE" ELEMENTS.

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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10. NO URGENCY. GROWING CONVICTION THAT ISRAEL CAN STRIKE A HARD BARGAIN AND THAT BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY RESTS ON SECRETARY TO DELIVER GOODS IS BASED ON SEVERAL ASSUMPTIONS RE OVERALL MILITARY/POLITICAL SCENE. ISRAELIS DO NOT BELIEVE THAT WAR WILL BREAK OUT IN NEAR FUTURE, EVEN IF SECRETARY'S CURRENT MEDIATION EFFORT PROVES UNSUCCESSFUL. TIMETABLE FOR POSSIBLE RISE IN POLITICAL TENSIONS FOCUSES RATHER ON RENEWAL OF UNEF/UNDOF MANDATES IN APRIL-MAY. MOREOVER, ISRAELIS BELIEVE THAT IDF IS IN NEAR OPTIMAL CONDITION FOR NEW WAR IF IT SHOULD COME. PRESS HAS HIGHLIGHTED MASSIVE INVESTMENT IN SINAI AND GOLAN HEIGHTS FORTIFICATIONS, REASSESSMENT OF IDF STRATEGY INCLUDING CORRECTION OF MISTAKES OF OCTOBER WAR, AS WELL AS MAJOR STRIDES IN RESUPPLY AND RENNOVATION OF EQUIPMENT.

1. US STAGED APPROACH. MAJOR SUBJECT OF DISCUSSION IN ISRAELI POLITICAL CIRCLES IN RECENT DAYS IS ASSESSMENT OF RELATIVE MERITS OF US STAGED APPROACH AND EARLY CONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE. MANY ISRAELI POLITICIANS, BOTH MODERATES AND
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HARDLINERS, APPEAR TO HAVE REACHED CONCLUSION THAT US STAGED APPROACH HAS ALREADY REACHED OR IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING END OF THE ROAD, AND AS COROLLARY THEY ARE TAKING HARD LOOK AT ALTERNATIVE OF GENEVA CONFERENCE OPTION.

12. GENEVA CONFERENCE. ADVOCACY OF THIS OPTION CLEARLY CONSTITUTES CRITICISM OF BOTH US AND ISRAELI POLICY. IN WJC SPEECH FEB 5 RABIN AGAIN ARGUED THAT GENEVA CONFERENCE WOULD LEAD TO "AN ALMOST IMMEDIATE POLITICAL STALEMATE". ADVOCATES, ON OTHER HAND, HAVE CALLED ATTENTION TO NUMBER OF POTENTIAL BENEFITS FOR ISRAEL: A) TO CONVINCE WESTERN OPINION THAT ISRAEL IS NOT CREATING OBSTACLE TO NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT OF ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE (BY REFUSING TO GO GENEVA), B) TO STALL FOR TIME, C) TO FORESTALL EGYPTIAN EFFORT TO IMPOSE SYRIAN LINKAGE AS PART OF INTERIM AGREEMENT, D) TO CALL ARAB-SOVIET "BLUFF, E) TO FORCE ARAB STATES TO OPENLY FACE REAL ISSUE, TO WIT THAT THEY MUST MAKE FAR-REACHING SUBSTANTIVE POLITICAL CONCESSIONS TO ISRAEL IN ORDER TO OBTAIN ISRAELI WITHDRAWALS AND F) TO ENABLE ISRAEL TO RETAIN ITS BARGAINING CHIPS UNTIL ARAB INTENTIONS ARE CLARIFIED ONCE AND FOR ALL, AND THEN TO TRADE THEM OFF ONLY IN CONTEXT OF FINAL SETTLEMENT.

13. FOR HARDLINERS, CONVENING OF GENEVA CONFERENCE IS SEEN PRIMARILY AS TACTICAL MOVE BY WHICH ISRAEL CAN STALL FOR TIME AND DEMONSTRATE TO WORLD OPINION THAT ARAB STATES ARE NOT INTERESTED IN PEACE. FOR MODERATES, ON OTHER HAND, GENEVA CONFERENCE IS POTENTIAL ALTERNATIVE TO US STAGED APPROACH, WITH ISRAEL GOING TO GENEVA TO EXPLORE POSSIBILITY FOR ACHIEVING REAL AND DEFINITIVE OVERALL SETTLEMENT. IF NECESSARY, SOME ARGUE, ELECTIONS SHOULD BE HELD TO STRENGTHEN GOVERNMENT'S MANDATE FOR THIS PURPOSE. THEREAFTER, DOVES BELIEVE GOI SHOULD EXPRESS READINESS FOR MAXIMAL TERRITORIAL CONCESSIONS ON ALL FRONTS IN EXCHANGE FOR SUBSTANTIVE ARAB POLITICAL CONCESSIONS PAVING WAY TO DEFINITIVE RESOLUTION OF ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE.

14. UNDERLYING ASSUMPTION IN BOTH CASES IS THAT US AND ISRAELI INTERESTS RE PREFERRED NEGOTIATING APPROACH MAY HAVE REACHED PARTING OF WAY. FROM US VIEWPOINT SOME ISRAELIS THINK, STAGED APPROACH HAS BENEFIT OF GAINING TIME--E.G. TO EASE ENERGY CRISIS, CONSOLIDATE US-EGYPTIAN-SAUDI ARABIAN
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AXIS, SHORE UP US-EUROPEAN RELATIONS, AND IMPROVE ADMINISTRATION'S STRENGTH VIS-A-VIS CONGRESS AFTER 1976 ELECTION. FOR ISRAEL, ON OTHER HAND, KEY INTEREST IS SEEN AS CLARIFICATION OF ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

15. ECONOMIC SITUATION. IN ADDITION TO THESE POLITICAL ISSUES, ISRAELIS ARE AWARE THAT COUNTRY IS MORE DEPENDENT THAN EVER BEFORE ON US FINANCING OF ITS ENORMOUS BALANCE OF PAYMENTS DEFICIT. THIS REALIZATION, PLUS VIEWS EXPRESSED BY RECENT CONGRESSIONAL VISITORS, HAS LED TO SPECULATION IN ISRAELI PRESS THAT US ASSISTANCE MAY NOT BE FORTHCOMING IN AMOUNT NEEDED. STATE OF ECONOMY ITSELF IS ALSO WORRISOME. RESULTS OF NOVEMBER STABILIZATION PACKAGE HAVE BEEN MEAGER SO FAR. THERE IS BELIEF THAT FURTHER BELT-TIGHTENING MAY BE NECESSARY, BUT CONCERN THAT AUSTERITY MEASURES SUFFICIENT TO STEM INFLATION AND PROTECT FOREIGN RESERVES COULD CAUSE SLUMP AND UNEMPLOYMENT. ISRAELIS WILL BE LOOKING TO SECRETARY FOR WHATEVER ASSURANCE HE CAN PROVIDE ON US AID PROGRAM.
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